

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division  
Engineering Heritage Committee***

***Oral History Program: Biographical Notes***

**Dundas Corbet Gore (1921 - )  
Civil Engineer**

- Birth and Family:** Dundas Corbet Gore was born in April, 1921 at Goondiwindi, NSW. His father was a stock and station agent, descended from a family of Darling Downs pastoralists, pioneer settlers from Ireland. His mother's grandfather was a Scottish immigrant, who eventually became Mayor of Rockhampton. He had two sisters.
- Married in New Guinea in 1956. Had 3 children, all adopted
- Schooling:** Goondiwindi State Primary School until age of 12.
- Secondary School – boarder at Church of England Grammar School, East Brisbane, matriculating in 1937, and again in 1938 as his family considered him too young to attend university.
- Qualifications:** Commenced Bachelor of Civil Engineering at University of Queensland, 1938.
- 1945/6 Bachelor of Civil Engineering, University of Sydney.
- Military Service:** Joined militia during second year at university. Volunteered for Air Force and was called up in December 1939. Served until 1945 RAAF – bomber / navigator in Sunderland flying boats - 1942-44 Coastal Command No 10 Squadron based in Plymouth, UK. After VE Day, ferried Australian troops from Port Moresby to Townsville. Discharged on Anzac Day, 1945.
- Memberships:** Standards Australia committee on concrete formwork
- Awards:** .
- Work History:** Work experience with Hornibrook's in 1945 led, on graduation, to position as Site Engineer on Boral oil refinery project at Matraville, Sydney in 1947.
- Branch Engineer, Hornibrook's, Port Kembla – construction of hot strip rolling mill for BHP, and rolling mill for Commonwealth Rolling Mills.
- 1950 – founding manager of Hornibrook subsidiary in New Guinea – established the company and completed a variety of projects including a wharf at Port Moresby, an airstrip, the Markham River bridge, roads and oil installations. Work was done mainly with war surplus equipment recovered from the jungles, due to lack of working capital.

While still manager of the New Guinea company, he returned to Australia in 1959 as construction manager for New South Wales as he wanted to move into more advanced construction activities. His first project was the construction of a launching ramp at Woomera, for Blue Streak rockets.

*(Construction of Kings and Commonwealth Avenue Bridges, Canberra)*

In 1961, he accepted Sir Manuel Hornibrook's invitation to take on job as construction manager of Sydney Opera House Stage 2 – the construction of the shells. His acceptance was on the proviso (granted) that his career path through the company would be protected.

Whilst at the outset there was not even a clear idea of how the shells would be built, Gore managed the near-impossible project to a successful conclusion. In the process he solved many problems and personally contributed a number of critical innovations including the method for casting the shell segments and the concept of the erection arch for assembling the shells.

(In an oral history interview for the Sydney Opera House Trust, Jack Zunz who in the consulting structural engineers Ove Arup's was responsible for the Opera House, described Gore's contribution to the Opera House in the following terms:

*'For sheer skill, coupled with an ability to manage people and for getting the Opera House shells built, he deserves all the credit. He's a very quiet, self effacing man, but without him, we could never have done it. We were proposing to build something which was very unusual and very difficult, and unlike most constructors, he turned round every problem and treated it in a positive way, He didn't find ways for not doing it, but treated a problem as a problem to be solved, which is unusual. Corbet conceived some very interesting ideas on how to put the Opera House together. ... it was Corbet who came up with the ideas for the special lifting tackle. Then the idea to cast the segments with matching surfaces, which had a most profound effect on the very quality of the look of the Opera House, was also his. Certainly the decision to go ahead with these proposals was ultimately ours, but the concepts were his.*

*I could name a hundred and one other different things. By his personal example, with the long hours he put in and his leadership on the site, he really kept the job rolling forward. Not least in his capacity in dealing with the men, because it was a time, if ever there's not a time, when there was a great deal of industrial unrest in the construction industry. Australia is rather renowned for its industrial problems in the construction industry. And he dealt with it all magnificently'.*

Over several years during the same period the NSW branch of Hornibrooks, under his direction, completed a hydro-electric power scheme for Port Moresby, including an underground power station.

On completion of Opera House Stage 2, in his role as a Director of Hornibrooks, he spend some unsatisfying years out of project management, finding work for the company.

In his final major project Gore managed Hornibrook's subsidiary Australian Pipeline Constructions in the construction of the second half of the Moomba to Sydney natural gas pipeline. The project encountered major problems due to the lack of necessary expertise and technology, and difficulties with the client-supplied pipe material.

On completion of this project Gore retired, at the age of 63.

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Prepared by Sarah Szacsvay, October 2002 from oral history interviews conducted on 27 November 1986 and 29 August 2002.